



Testimony of Mylan Bannon, SHRM-CP

In Support of

LD 46, An Act to Establish a Grant Program to Increase Postsecondary Educational Opportunities for Students with Intellectual or Developmental Disabilities or Autism Spectrum Disorder.

**Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs
March 3, 2025**

Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs,

My name is Mylan Bannon, and I am the Director of Academic Affairs Operations at Saint Joseph's College in Standish, Maine. I testify today on behalf of Saint Joseph's College in strong support of LD46.

Saint Joseph's College in Standish expresses enthusiastic support for Bill LD 46. We are pleased to see this bill back on the agenda, as it aims to create pathways for education and provide meaningful experiences tailored to students' needs. We also applaud the bill's recognition that higher education institutions need start-up funding to develop inclusive programs and that the families and caregivers of students with intellectual and developmental disability, as well as those on the autism spectrum, can benefit greatly from the availability of scholarship funding. Saint Joseph's College was fortunate to receive a number of grants for seed and scholarship funding from several foundations that give in Maine. These helped to partially cover our start-up expenses, and we remain deeply thankful to the Maine Developmental Disabilities Council, which provided early seed funding for the program.

For the past two years, Saint Joseph's College has offered integrated postsecondary educational opportunities for students with intellectual and developmental disability not only because we recognize the significance of education for a variety of learners, but because educational access is part of a mission that has guided us since the Sisters of Mercy opened the college in 1912.

When setting up our Integrated Studies program, we were fortunate to draw on many best practices developed by another Catholic Mercy College, Gwynedd Mercy, in Pennsylvania, which has run a successful Integrated Studies program with an enrollment of 40 students for several years. As we work to enhance our inclusive programming, Saint Joseph's College is eager to share our experiences and collaborate with other institutions in Maine on best practices related to inclusive education and universal design. By joining forces with a shared objective of improving educational opportunities across the State of Maine, together, we can help unlock the



Where community grows.

potential of even more individuals to become fully involved into our communities and workforce.

We recognize that full inclusiveness of our students extends beyond the educational setting. In closing, we offer to share some examples of student success, not only as it relates to academics, but independence, life skills, and growth of natural supports.

Students drive their student-centered planning, set goals on personal interests, internship planning, and beyond. Our students participate in wellness classes, go to the gym, attend student recreation events, and contribute to student organized clubs. To support this process, Saint Joseph's College provides opportunities for one-on-one paid support and we have been successful to transition students to independent participation alongside their peers.

"These programs change lives," says the parent of one of our students.

We appreciate your consideration today and Saint Joseph's College stands ready to share its learnings with the Legislature and other postsecondary programs in Maine who are committed to developing these inclusive programs.